



# VISIBLE STORAGE

AT THE  
FDR LIBRARY AND MUSEUM



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Franklin Roosevelt was an inveterate collector whose interests ranged from naval art and ship models to paintings and prints that reflected the landscape and culture of his native Hudson River Valley. Both he and Eleanor Roosevelt believed the arts to be a vital part of life —of everybody’s lives. They supported the work of artists and craftspeople and sponsored public art in schools, post offices, libraries and museums. And they took personal pleasure in collecting art and crafts from around the world.

The Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, which FDR built as the nation’s first presidential library, houses not just the vast archival collections of the Roosevelt era—from the beginning it was also conceived as a *museum*. After FDR’s death Mrs. Roosevelt took great pride in adding to the museum collections and never failed to bring her guests to view its exhibits.

For the Roosevelts, with their dedication to democratic ideals, the arts—like archives—were not to be locked away, reserved only for the use of the privileged few.

Franklin Roosevelt put it this way when he dedicated the National Gallery of Art, one of his proudest accomplishments, on March 17, 1941:

*There was a time when the people of this country would not have thought that the inheritance of art belonged to them. . . . A few generations ago, the people of this country were often taught . . . that art was something foreign to America and to themselves—something imported from another continent, something from an age which was not theirs—something they had no part in, save to go to see it in some guarded room on holidays or Sundays. . . .*

It is well-known, certainly, that the federal government during the Roosevelt Administration saw the largest expansion of public support for the arts in our nation's history. FDR was proud of this democratization of the arts, stating *“the people of this country know now, whatever they were taught or thought they knew before, that art is not something just to be owned but something to be made: that it is the act of making and not the act of owning that is art.”*

Through the W.P.A., the Public Arts Section of the Treasury Department, the National Youth Administration and other less well known initiatives, the New Deal supported the production of hundreds of thousands of works of art. And while Mrs. Roosevelt is remembered as a social reformer, relatively few people understand how she used the arts to turn her advocacy into action. With three friends she created Val-Kill Industries, an arts and crafts movement studio for the production of fine furniture, pewter ware, textiles, and other decorative objects with the purpose of providing a *métier*—and an awakened creative spirit—to impoverished rural youth.

Beyond their sponsorship of art, President and Mrs. Roosevelt were collectors. From an early age Franklin Roosevelt collected stamps, ship models, and rare books. By the time he was President he had amassed one of the nation's finest collections of naval art and impressive collections of Hudson valley art and historical prints. During the New Deal he collected hundreds of examples of art produced by the W.P.A. and other agencies. The products of Mrs. Roosevelt's Val-Kill Industries eventually made their way into the collections of the Roosevelt Library, as did remarkable examples of folk art and fine art from around the world that came to them as gifts. Descended from old families, both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's collections contain noteworthy American silver, jewelry, and antique furniture.

## **Background**

The Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum is the first of our nation's twelve presidential libraries and is part of the National Archives and Records Administration. It opened to the public in 1941 as World War II raged in Europe. FDR declared in dedicating the Library that “a nation must believe in three things. It must believe in the past. It must believe in the future. It must, above all, believe in the capacity of its people

so to learn from the past that they can gain in judgment for the creation of the future.” For Roosevelt, speaking in the shadow of the Nazis’ book burnings and destruction of so-called “degenerate” art, the Library in its archive and museum collections, promised the power of self-determination to future generations.

The exhibits in that early museum were not about the public life and work of the Roosevelts, but rather showcased the collections that Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt treasured for the possibilities of national and regional awareness that they offered: ship models, naval and maritime art; Hudson Valley and W.P.A. art, folk and fine art given to the Roosevelts by ordinary people, and state gifts from nations new and old in Asia, Africa, South America, Europe and the Middle East.

As changes were made to the museum beginning in the 1950s, ever so slowly the collections that were so important to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were put behind closed doors. New exhibits were installed to inform new generations of the historical legacy of these great Americans and the collections of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt became largely unknown to the public. Less than 10 percent of the Roosevelt Library collection has ever been exhibited. Today less than 3 percent is on view.

At present the Library is in the beginning stages of a \$42 million federally funded renovation. This will be the first major renovation of the building’s infrastructure, mechanical, and security systems since it opened. Most important, it will vastly improve the Library’s ability to preserve for future generations the Roosevelts’ archival and art collections and make them available to the public. All renovations will be done within the existing envelope of the Library building. The original historic building—both inside and out—will be carefully preserved.

The Library’s private non-profit partner, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, has raised \$5.5 million in private funds to design and install new permanent exhibits on the life and times of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. The new exhibits will be installed in 12,000 square feet of renovated state-of-the-art gallery space. They will tell the remarkable story of Franklin Roosevelt’s early life and his battle against polio, his rise to the presidency, and the world-changing events of the New Deal and Second World War. Eleanor Roosevelt’s role as his full political partner and her work with the United Nations,

civil rights, and other social causes after FDR's death will be fully integrated into the narrative.

As the first, the Roosevelt Library is the smallest of our nation's presidential libraries. Yet, it must present the dramatic history of the Great Depression and World War II and the complex story of America's only four-term president. The Library's limited museum space leaves little room to display the art and personal collections of the Roosevelts, especially since the historical exhibits must employ the latest in space-consuming audiovisual and computer technology.

### **The Proposal**

The collections of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum reflect, in countless ways, the varied personalities and interests of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. They also bear eloquent and beautiful testimony to the forgotten aesthetic sensibilities of the Roosevelts and their determination that art belonged in the lives of everyone. FDR believed that people could learn valuable historical lessons from viewing displays of these items. The only way to provide public access to these extraordinary collections is to open the storeroom spaces in the lower level.

In the course of the government-funded renovation of the Roosevelt Presidential Library, 4,200 square feet of space will be made available for new museum collection storage by relocating much of the Library's mechanical equipment to the basement of the Henry A. Wallace Center. New mechanical rooms and the conduits necessary to operate the equipment are all in place there.

Normally these new collection storage areas would be fitted out by the National Archives as closed storerooms with state-of-the-art environmental and security controls—but no access for public viewing.

The Roosevelt Library proposes instead to develop these spaces as "open" or visible storerooms, designed to make the collections available for public viewing while still safeguarding their long-term preservation and security.

The National Archives has agreed to our proposal, provided that we raise from private sources the funds necessary to install fire-rated glass walls, specialized shelving and casework, low-level lighting, and other special fixtures necessary to place the objects on public view in a safe and visually compelling manner.

The premier space in the new visible storage facility will recreate (in 21st century terms) the President's original "Naval Room," which was a favorite among the Library's original exhibitions. In other areas, custom display systems will provide secure visitor access to thousands of objects, including Roosevelt family paintings and portraits; furniture (including a collection of Val-Kill Industries pieces); President and Mrs. Roosevelt's jewelry and other personal effects (including hand-crafted equipment he used to aid his disability); W.P.A. and other New Deal art; political memorabilia; head of state and other gifts; family silver and china; and items collected by both Roosevelts on their world wide travels.

Touch-screen video interactives located at terminals throughout the facility will provide electronic access to the entire collection, including thousands of works of art on paper, clothing, and other fragile objects that for conservation reasons cannot be put on permanent display.

*The total cost to design, re-house, display, and conserve the collections in the new visible storage facility is \$3.5 million.*

## Visible Storage at the FDR Library and Museum

*(Major naming opportunity)*

**\$3.5 million**

*Visible storage may also be supported through gifts designated for specific collections. Naming opportunities are available for substantial donations to create the following special areas.*

<b>Naval Room</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>
<b>FDR's Ford Phaeton</b>	<b>\$ 500,000</b>
<b>Paintings</b>	<b>\$ 300,000</b>
<b>State Gifts</b>	<b>\$ 300,000</b>
<b>Art of the People: Presidential Gifts</b>	<b>\$ 300,000</b>
<b>Roosevelt Family Collections</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>
<b>Val-Kill Industries</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>
<b>Prints, Drawings, and Posters</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>
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<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,500,000</b>

### **Conclusion**

Locked away behind closed doors, the 35,000 objects in the collections of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum are the holdings of a family whose democratic impulses and political power shaped the twentieth century. These collections provide a unique window into the lives of the Roosevelts and, equally important, into the creativity of the artists and artisans of the mid-twentieth century who flourished under the remarkable public and private sponsorship of the arts during the Roosevelt era. More egalitarian than aristocratic, these collections represent the democratic pulse of the people in twentieth century America. As such they are the American equivalent to the imperial treasures of European royalty.

## NAVAL ROOM

A highlight of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum when it opened its doors in 1941 was the “Naval Room.” It showcased selections from President Roosevelt’s rich collection of ship models.

FDR took a personal interest in the original exhibit, helping to select and arrange the models on display. The Naval Room remained a popular attraction at the Roosevelt Museum until it was dismantled during the 1970s. Since that time, the public has rarely been able to view more than a few of FDR’s treasured models. In the new visible storage center at the Roosevelt Museum FDR’s ship models will once again be accessible to the public. They will appear alongside smaller displays of naval relics, scrimshaw and other nautical treasures collected by FDR.

There are over four hundred models in the President’s collection. Roosevelt purchased some of these, including elaborate fully-rigged model sailing ships from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Others were gifts from friends and admirers. During his presidency many of FDR’s ship models graced the living quarters of the White House. Among his favorites was a large model of the USS *Constitution* that occupied a prominent place in his White House Study. Roosevelt had personally re-rigged the ship during his years as Governor of New York.



Silver model of Swedish galleon, 17th century.



Wood model of World War II troop transport ship, ca. 1944.



Wood model of USS *Constitution*, ca. 1818.

## FDR'S FORD PHAETON

One of the largest and most important items in the Museum collection is President Roosevelt's 1936 Ford Phaeton automobile. Specially modified so that it could be driven using manual controls, this car gave the President the freedom to drive despite his disability. There is even a metal box just below the steering wheel that dispenses lighted cigarettes.

The President enjoyed driving his automobile during his frequent visits to Hyde Park. He used it to inspect his tree plantations, go on picnics, and drive over favorite country roads. After his death, Eleanor Roosevelt used the car until late 1946, when she presented it to the Museum.



FDR's 1936 Ford Phaeton convertible.

## PAINTINGS

The Museum's painting collection contains a diverse mix of artworks from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among these is a sizable collection of art that reflects FDR's interest in the landscapes and people of the Hudson River Valley, including nineteenth century landscape paintings by Thomas Benjamin Pope and Louis Grube. The President's love of the sea and the United States Navy is represented in a large group of paintings of warships, sea battles, and naval officers. There are nearly 100 paintings by artists employed by New Deal agencies during the Great Depression, including oil studies produced by Olin Dows for the New Deal-funded murals he created for the Hyde Park, New York Post Office. Roosevelt family history is represented in nearly 40 family portraits. There is also a large selection of paintings presented to the Roosevelts as gifts from governments and individual admirers.



**Bernard Gribble, *Surrender of the German Fleet to the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow*, 1919.**



**Frank O. Salisbury, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, 1935.**



**Thomas Benjamin Pope, *View of the Hudson Highlands*, 1882.**

## STATE GIFTS

The collections at the Roosevelt Museum include nearly 200 state gifts presented to Franklin Roosevelt during his presidency. Each embodies the finest of that nation's artistry, wealth, antiquity or creativity. All are objects of great value. Many are one-of-a-kind items or represent artisanal traditions that have disappeared. The gifts include precious jewelry, paintings, furniture, tapestries, weapons and pottery.

A premier item in the collection is a set of gold daggers and swords set with diamonds presented by King Ibn Saud during his February 1945 meeting with FDR on the Great Bitter Lake. Other highlights include a 1,298-carat aquamarine stone from the President of Brazil and a tiara decorated with multicolored jewels from the Sultan of Morocco. There is a gold globe from Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, a Swedish crystal vase from the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden, an eighteenth century portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette from the French Government, and a set of watercolor paintings by Arthur Szyk depicting "George Washington and His Times"—a gift from the President of Poland. Some of the more unusual items include a hand-sewn Tibetan thanga presented by the Dalai Lama, twenty-five specimens of pre-Columbian Peruvian pottery given by the President of Peru, and an elaborately hand-carved wood inkstand from King Koroki on behalf of the Tainui Canoe people of New Zealand. The state gifts collection also features several unusual pieces from Allied war leaders, including a Soviet submachine gun from Russian leader Joseph Stalin.



Dagger and sheath presented to FDR by King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in 1945.



Gold inkwell presented to FDR by King George VI of the United Kingdom during his 1939 visit to Hyde Park.



Pre-Columbian Peruvian pottery presented to FDR by the President of Peru in 1942.

## ART OF THE PEOPLE: PRESIDENTIAL GIFTS

A beloved and admired leader, Franklin Roosevelt received many gifts from the public. Though some of these were mass-produced pieces, a large number were handmade tokens, trinkets, and works of folk art made by ordinary Americans and mailed to the President. When the Museum opened in 1941, FDR created a special room—dubbed the “Oddities Room”—for the display of selections from his gift collection.

That collection contains thousands of items representing the work of talented amateurs, as well as the finest designers and craftsmen. Some of these gifts—including carved statuettes of the Roosevelts by noted African American artist Leslie Garland Bolling—are remarkable examples of folk art. The formats, materials, and subjects of the gifts vary widely and encompass everything from needlework and drawings to musical instruments, sculpture, and furniture. They run the gamut from the artistic to the homely, clever, patriotic, personal, serious, witty, or broadly humorous. A large portion feature portraits of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in a variety of media, ranging from sculpture, painting, and embroidery to mosaic tile, stamps, and leaves.



Ernestine Guerrero, *The Chimes of Normandy*, fashioned from wooden food ration boxes, gift to FDR, 1937.



Luella Smith, silk vest with multi-colored buttons, gift to FDR, 1944.

## ROOSEVELT FAMILY COLLECTIONS

The Museum's most prized possessions are the many personal items that have a direct connection to the lives of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. These encompass everything from childhood toys and drawings to clothing and family heirlooms. Descended from old families, the Roosevelts also passed on collections containing noteworthy silver, jewelry, and antique furniture.

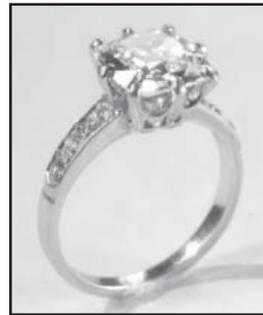
Roosevelt family history can be traced in nearly 40 family portraits in the collections by artists such as Eastman Johnson, Charles Saint-Memin, William West, and Douglas Chandor. A collection of family furniture includes many pieces used by the President and First Lady, along with furniture inherited from Roosevelt and Delano ancestors.

The collections boast over 600 items used by Franklin Roosevelt. The majority are clothing, jewelry, and accessories, including suits, his famous naval cloak, the jeweled ushers' stickpin from Tiffany's he designed for his 1905 wedding, his silver martini shaker, and a favorite set of monogrammed poker chips. There are also seven pairs of his leg braces, a set of crutches, and other devices (including pincers for picking up out-of-reach papers) for overcoming his disability.

The nearly 800 objects used by Eleanor Roosevelt range from knitting needles to a 1679 silver monteith bowl by Boston silversmith John Coney passed down from her Livingston relatives. There are 32 pieces of jewelry that include a group of carved coral brooches and a set of tiger-claw jewelry inherited from her mother. Other highlights are Mrs. Roosevelt's 5.2-carat diamond engagement ring, a 44-diamond family heirloom necklace given to her by a cousin, and a gold locket that bears the marks of her children's teeth.



Young Franklin Roosevelt enjoyed riding this wooden hobbyhorse.



Eleanor Roosevelt's diamond engagement ring and a gold fleur-de-lis brooch that she wore frequently.



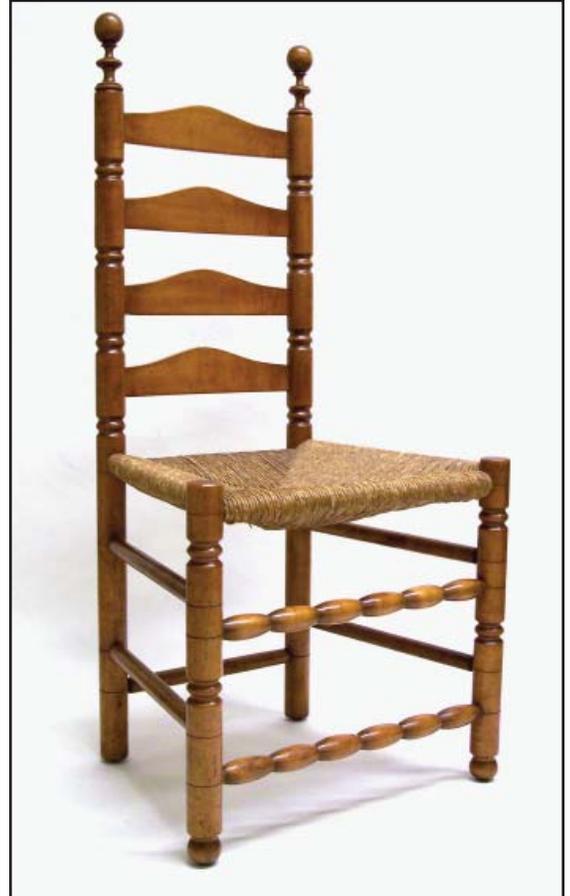
Otto Schmidt, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 1933.

## VAL-KILL INDUSTRIES

One of the FDR Museum's unique holdings is a large collection of items produced by Val-Kill Industries. Created in 1926 by Eleanor Roosevelt and her friends Nancy Cook, Marion Dickerman, and Caroline O'Day, Val-Kill Industries was a craft studio operation in the spirit of the arts and crafts movement. It produced finely crafted furniture based on early American designs. The friends' venture had a reform component. Saddened by the exodus of rural New Yorkers to large cities in search of jobs, they decided to create a business that would train rural youth for off-season employment within their own communities. They believed that if these farm workers learned manufacturing skills in addition to agriculture, they would have a source of income when farming was unprofitable.

Though it struggled financially, Val-Kill Industries continued through the worst years of the Great Depression and provided some employment in the Hyde Park area. A pewter forge and a homespun weaving enterprise were added in 1934. The furniture factory and pewter operation closed in 1936, but weaving work continued into the 1940s.

The Museum's Val-Kill collection includes 22 pieces of furniture. Among these are desks, tables, beds (including a bed commissioned by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1933 for the White House), chests, and chairs. There are also 35 pewter pieces and a smaller number of one-offs, including a copper candlestick and a wood inkwell.



Rush seat chair, Val-Kill Industries, early 1930s.



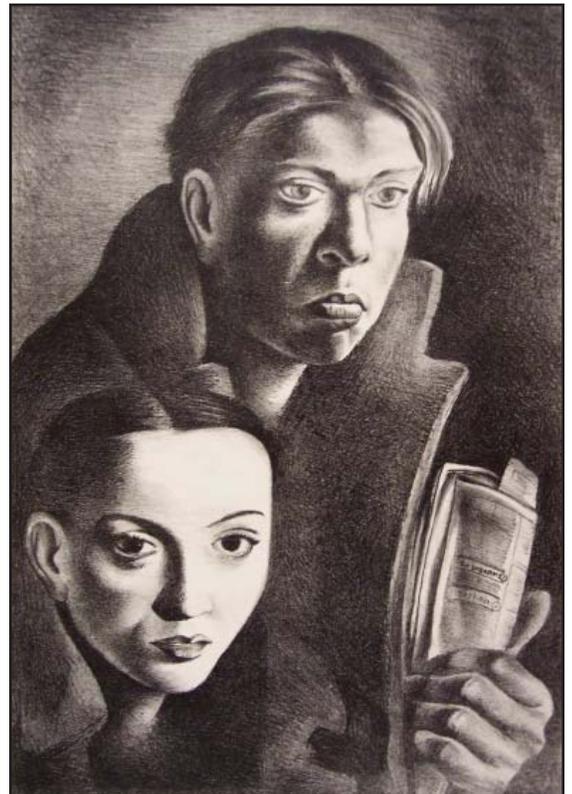
Walnut nightstand, Val-Kill Industries, early 1930s.

## PRINTS, DRAWINGS, AND POSTERS

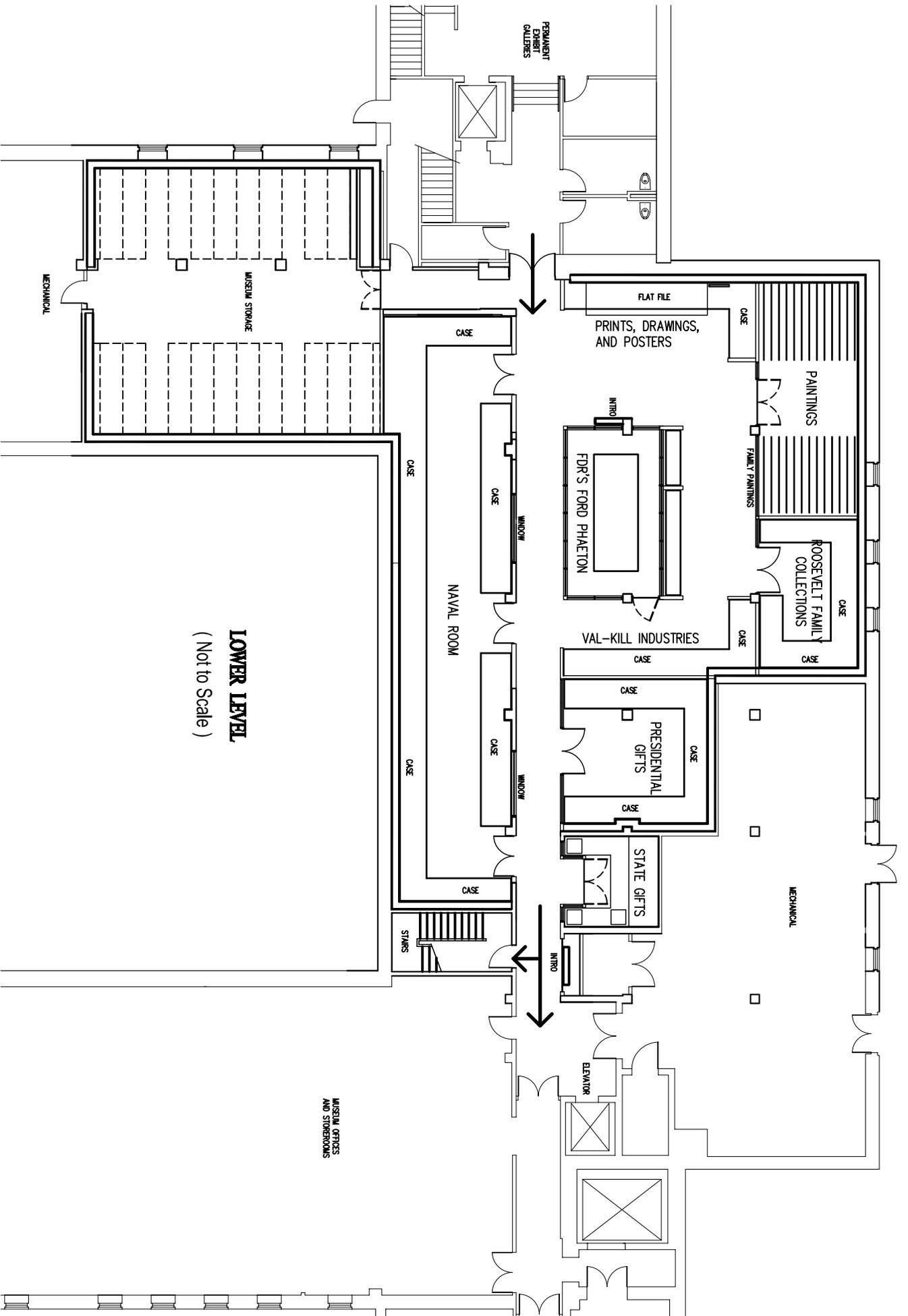
The Museum's extensive collection of prints, drawings, and posters exemplifies FDR's wide-ranging collecting interests. Among its greatest treasures is the President's immense trove of over 1000 prints and drawings related to the history of the United States Navy. These formed the core of a unique naval collection he amassed that, at the time of his death, was considered one of the finest private collections of its kind in the country. FDR also gathered a large and varied set of historical images of his beloved Hudson River Valley. A large collection of prints and drawings created by artists employed by New Deal agencies includes items that caught the interest of the President or First Lady. The cartoon collection features over 700 cartoons. Most are original artworks given to the President. There are nearly 4700 items in the poster collection. At its heart is an immense and unusually rich group of World War II posters covering every conceivable aspect of America's war effort. There is also a large selection of World War I posters and over 250 political campaign posters.



Wartime poster celebrating women in industry, n.d.



Joseph Vavak, *Character Study*, Illinois Art Project, W.P.A., late 1930s.



**LOWER LEVEL**  
 (Not to Scale)